

School District of New Richmond

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Situated at the junction of Highways 64 and 65, New Richmond is about 45 minutes from the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul. New Richmond High School is located on the southern edge of this community of about 5,500, only blocks away from the Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College-New Richmond campus. The school, home of the New Richmond Tigers, is a recently remodeled building, complete with upgraded music and art facilities, a new library, and classrooms. Neither age nor vandals have marked the lockers that line the hallways; classroom walls still have that twinkle of fresh paint.

The School District of New Richmond operates a four-year high school, one middle school, and two elementary schools. Nearly 180 certified instructional staff serve a school population of about 2,400 students. The district student population is overwhelmingly white students (99 percent), with a very small number of African American, Native American, Hispanic, and Asian American students. About 14 percent of the total student population receives a free or reduced-priced lunch.

The New Richmond School District views itself as a steward of public trust and resources. The district accepts the responsibility to provide a comprehensive educational program and a learning environment that allows for the intellectual, physical, emotional, cultural, social, and moral growth of children in a changing world. The district has

three supporting goals:

- Align the organizational structure and educational delivery system to focus on student performance and service to the community.
- Provide safe and nurturing schools where the efforts of teaching and support staff enhance the learning environment to help all students succeed in school.
- Engage parents and the community in school improvement through meaningful involvement and effective two-way communications at the school, district, and community level.

The district recently participated in a countywide assessment process conducted by St. Croix County Public Health and task forces. A youth survey was administered to all students in grades 6, 8, 10, and 12 in October 1995 as part of the assessment. Search Institute, a Twin Cities-based organization, created and analyzed the survey. As a result, terms such as “assets” and “resiliency” are becoming household words in the New Richmond area. Marilyn Peplau, a New Richmond High School guidance counselor, summed up the overall sentiment of the school district this way, “We no longer see students as a liability and that we have to have so many resources to meet their needs. We see the students as a resource.”

Implementation Strategies

No single person or event served as the catalyst for the many positive changes now visible in the New Richmond School District. A combination of factors had a significant impact on how the staff views its job as educators and how the community perceives its role in creating a climate that supports children, youth, and families. Indeed, all the factors

described below contributed to the positive changes.

School-Community Connections

The Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College (WITC), area businesses, the local Chamber of Commerce, and city government are all establishing strong communications with the district on a regular basis. The district and its community partners are developing collaborative strategies and new ideas on how to support children and their families. Some of these include providing teachers with time during the school day to teach parenting classes at a local manufacturing company; offering incentives for senior students to enroll in a computer technology class at WITC; and using business sites as apprenticeship opportunities for high school juniors and seniors.

Freedom to Pursue New Approaches

Staff in the Guidance Department were enthusiastic about the concepts embodied in resiliency research and Peter Benson's work at the Search Institute. The New Richmond School Board created an opportunity for district administrators and staff to develop a vision that empowered students, teachers, and parents to become active partners in shaping school policy, programs, and curricula. District Administrator Jim Wold says that the school board provided freedom for administrators and staff to develop a vision and implement it in a manner they view as most beneficial to students. These dynamics enabled district staff to take the risk of trying new initiatives that placed students at the center of all decision making. According to Wold, the question that is now continually asked whenever programs and policies are discussed is, "How does this benefit students?"

From Tragedy to Opportunity

Change also occurred because of several major car accidents that resulted in the death of one student, brain injury to two others, and additional minor injuries to still others. The school and community took notice of the opportunity in the face of tragedy and turned those events into a positive response. Northwest Counseling, a private agency, sent one of its counselors to work with students as they struggled to adjust to the tragedies. As a result of this community resource,

students learned about being sensitive to and caring for people with disabilities; about their own resources for dealing with challenging life events; and about creating opportunities out of tragedies. For example, students developed their Arrive Alive program (discussed under Student Programs) that today is an active and highly regarded prevention strategy in the district.

Another death in the community created yet another opportunity for learning. The death of a partner in a local law firm resulted in the family's commitment of memorial funds to sponsor a series of community forums. These forums brought the community together in conversation over topics important to New Richmond citizens. A panel of young people shared their ideas about what was needed in the community. Tim Burns, a nationally recognized educator and author whose work focuses on developing resiliency in young people, families, and communities, presented at one of the forums.

Community Assessment

The countywide assessment conducted in coordination with the Search Institute also had a significant impact on the New Richmond School District. The information learned from that experience galvanized the school and community into a cohesive force to address identified risk factors and develop assets. By successfully communicating with the countywide Adolescent Health Task Force, New Richmond counselors were able to use the Search Institute's assets-focused assessment approach rather than the usual problem-oriented approach. The result is that the community and the school district are growing more knowledgeable about creating programs and activities that develop youth assets and reduce risk factors.

CESA 11 and Department of Public Instruction Support

The Healthy Community/Healthy Youth Team (HC/HYT) is the center of activity for all resiliency and asset-building programs in the district. The HC/HYT was created by the guidance teams as an initiative responding to the Department of Public Instruction's Comprehensive School Health Program Framework grant, which funded Cooperative Educational Service Agency (CESA) 11's "Integrated Youth Development" AOD Consortium Program Grant. The grant enabled CESA 11 to provide a structure for local districts to plan and

develop their own initiatives. New Richmond was one of the districts that formed a multidisciplinary team (including community members) and participated in a CESA 11 workshop in the fall of 1996. The workshop featured a presentation by Tim Burns and provided planning time for school teams to determine local direction. During the 1996-97 school year, the New Richmond team engaged in ongoing study, planning, and implementation, using articles and other resource materials provided by CESA 11.

The New Richmond team leader participated with other school team leaders in ongoing meetings organized by CESA 11 to share progress, dilemmas, and resources. The CESA 11 Integrated Youth Development grant provided money for stipends and substitutes, which facilitated participation by school and community team members. (More detail on New Richmond's HC/HYT is found in the section on Family and Community Connections.)

Healthy School Environment

The New Richmond School District has designed and is now implementing a comprehensive approach to developing the student, improving the school environment, and establishing stronger teacher-student connections. Changes in the perception of students and the community are taking place, with student assets publicly recognized in new ways. For example, academic letter and medal winners are recognized and earn a "letter jacket" just like athletes. In addition, the National Honor Society has become a coveted membership.

The Healthy Community/Healthy Youth Team serves as a strong foundation for the development of student programs. Many of the programs have had a positive impact on the school climate, supporting resiliency and assets development. This is affirmed in the Developmental Guidance curriculum, which promotes student health and wellness throughout all grades. Students then are empowered to participate in creating a healthy school environment through their class work as well as through student activities, clubs, and events.

Some major initiatives in fostering a healthy school environment are described below:

Students as Resources with Assets

A growing norm in the New Richmond school culture is the belief that students are resources with assets. In that vein, students actively serve

on many school committees, mentor other students, and even participate in the hiring process for new faculty. During the summer of 1997, 15 students were involved in the hiring process for new teachers, participating in the interview teams and serving as tour guides for faculty candidates. Staff members say that students developed a sense of ownership and responsibility for the new staff. One counselor reported that she heard one student talk about a new teacher saying, "I hired her." The counselor says that "involving students in the hiring process is using their valuable input on traits and insights about classroom interactions with teachers. It's the power of kids and how important they are to the overall environment of the school."

Student and Parent Orientation Programs

Guidance staff have developed programs that assist students and parents to negotiate the key transitions in a student's school career. A new program exists for parents of children entering kindergarten, another for youth entering middle school and their parents, and yet another for youth entering their first year of high school and their parents. These orientation programs help reduce stress and increase student success during transition times.

In the Kindergarten Roundup program, parents and their children go to the kindergarten rooms, meet the staff, play games, read books, and participate in other activities designed to orient both parents and children to kindergarten. Similar to other schools, New Richmond had three or four cases of school-phobia with entering kindergartners. "Since the Kindergarten Roundup started three years ago," says one elementary counselor, "that has changed. Students are now more resilient and able to make adequate adjustments to school."

The middle school also holds a full-day orientation camp for entering sixth graders. According to one of the middle school counselors, this day provides a relaxed, pressure-free opportunity for these students to meet all of their teachers and to spend some time with their homeroom teacher prior to the first day of school. School counselors say this day-long orientation program has helped students to reduce anxieties about middle school and to become more resilient to the changing class schedules and environment.

Entering ninth graders receive orientation apart from their parents. Students are exposed to

the myriad programs and opportunities available to them in high school, including having a mentor, community service, clubs, athletics, and many other extracurricular and co-curricular activities. Their parents, in the meantime, are involved in a discussion that includes how they can become active in the school and about the various volunteer opportunities that are available. Perhaps more important is that parents participate in a discussion on the developmental assets and strategies to help students succeed in school.

Change to Middle School Model

A new development for the 1997-98 school year was the change from a junior high school model to a middle school model. While this has been under discussion for nearly a decade, it was not until the spring of 1997 that the New Richmond School Board approved the concept and plan and the necessary staff to implement a middle school. The middle school is using the “House” system to develop a school environment conducive to building assets and resiliency in students.

In the “House” system, students are assigned to selected teachers for the entire duration of their middle school years. This provides many more opportunities for teachers and students to establish strong connections while teachers and parents also build strong bonds. One middle school counselor says that the “House” system facilitates the development of a school environment based on resiliency, which offers caring support, high expectations, meaningful participation, and multiple protective factors for kids. The middle school principal says he wants every middle school student to have an adult to which they feel connected. The Advisor/Advisee Program, which works well in the “House” system, also contributes to accomplishing this goal.

Facilitating Student Transitions

Because the transfer from middle school to high school can be unsettling for a teen, the New Richmond School District has developed ways to ease this transition. A ninth-grade/transfer student orientation provides a firm foundation for youth and a chance for parents to network. This year, the Healthy Community/Healthy Youth Team facilitated a roundtable on resiliency and asset-building for approximately 180 parents. In addition, homerooms have changed at the high school so that a youth stays with the same advisor all four years. The Peer Mentor program (described

in more detail in the Student Programs section) helps ease the transition. Sophomore, junior, or senior mentors are provided for each ninth grader wanting a partner to assist during the first part of the year; last year 170 of 216 ninth graders had mentors.

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

The New Richmond School District incorporates health and wellness instruction throughout all grades and, in high school, through all classes. For example, as ninth graders read *Romeo and Juliet*, they select a character, analyze assets, and discuss how the outcome of the drama would have been different with additional assets. Even the Spanish teachers at the high school level have the Spanish version of the asset checklist available for class projects.

The alcohol, tobacco, and other drug abuse prevention program in the elementary and middle schools is interwoven into the curriculum and focuses on developmental assets. HIV/STD and pregnancy prevention education is provided in the middle and high school programs in health and family and consumer education classes.

Service learning is another component of the K-12 curriculum. Elementary students engage in community service through a program in fourth grade, while middle and high school students are encouraged to participate in other service learning activities. High school students in the Student To Student (STS) organization are also involved in service learning through their work with elementary and middle school students as well as with their peers. STS members are trained using an asset-building model.

The K-12 guidance team has rewritten its curriculum to include developmental assets, Wisconsin Developmental Guidance competencies, and the Wisconsin Citizenship Initiative core values. The core citizenship values are

courage: the strength to stand up for one's convictions when conscience demands

honesty: the ability to approach issues and individuals in a straightforward manner without any trace of deception or fraudulence

respect: the ability to demonstrate regard and sensitivity for the people with whom we come in contact as well as the physical world around us and

responsibility: the quality with which good citizens are able to act without guidance from another

The developmental guidance curriculum serves as the foundation for pupil services programming. The curriculum, in its fourth revision since 1974, helps students get increasingly involved in their school and community as they become more mature. In the elementary schools, the curriculum focuses on exposing students to conversations and dialogue on topics of the day; this creates confidence and comfort with talking in class as they get older.

Another aspect of the developmental guidance curriculum is use of portfolios for student assessment, beginning in the fourth grade. New Richmond Middle School staff say that the schools are now using portfolios as a way of pulling together information for students to use in making career decisions, an approach that helps to develop internal motivation. The district is also looking closely at community assets and will add corresponding resiliency components to the guidance curriculum over time.

Guidance counselors set aside time for developmental guidance in both elementary and middle schools each week, using the lessons that have been developed within the new framework. Teachers are helpful in suggesting topics and themes and are expected to become more so following additional asset-building inservices.

Pupil Services

The New Richmond Pupil Services Team is composed of the director of Special Services/EEN; two school psychologists (shared by the schools); and six elementary, middle, and high school counselors. Pupil Services Team members are intricately involved in current efforts to advance asset-building and resiliency programming at New Richmond. Some team members also belong to the Healthy Community/Healthy Youth Team. This multifaceted team serves as the center of activity for all the resiliency and asset-building programs for the district.

Key components of the pupil services program include: implementing a strong developmental guidance curriculum that includes using portfolios, instituting the DPI's nine competencies, and utilizing the DPI Citizenship Initiative's core values.

New Richmond also has a School Improvement Management Team, which is responsible for de-

veloping the school improvement plan; guidance and counseling team; and multidisciplinary teams that address EEN-related issues.

Student Programs

Student programs at New Richmond are based on a positive youth development model, with resiliency as a core element. Peer programs focus on helping students to develop positive and healthy behaviors rather than being problem focused. For example, groups formerly known as "aftercare" are called "pathfinders," and grief groups are called "rebound."

Counselors say that students are regarded as resources, as people with assets. Many of the programs at New Richmond reflect this perspective. While students participate in many of the standard extracurricular programs and activities (for example, athletics, forensics, or drama), they also spend a tremendous amount of time and energy in groups and activities focused on health and wellness-related themes. These activities provide opportunities for self-growth; assets development; and service to their peers, school, and community.

Meaningful participation is a significant protective factor for students, and providing such opportunities is a collaborative effort in the New Richmond School District. For example, all the extracurricular clubs collaborate on a community Christmas dinner attended by up to 120 people, and Future Farmers of America (FFA) sponsors a Corn Drive for Camp Courage. Following is a list of student programs and their descriptors; however, many others are not listed here.

Student-To-Student (STS)

Student-To-Student is a highly regarded organization at New Richmond High School, according to student reports. To join, students must first be nominated by their peers or themselves; then they are interviewed by two adults focusing on their vision of the school. While students must go through a teacher-directed selection process, the organization is student-directed. Selected students participate in training activities that include role playing and other exercises designed to illustrate ways to address personal concerns. An important element in the training is learning how to listen.

The 42 current STS students develop other student groups and become involved in schoolwide Positive Youth Development activities (for ex-

ample, facilitating weekly homeroom discussions on selected topics and themes). The STS program also provides an information session regarding the Peer Mentor programs to ninth-grade students during their orientation.

The positives from this organization are many, according to both staff and students. "I don't think the skills we're learning through STS will ever stop," says one high school student leader. "There are so many things I've learned from STS that I know they'll be with me for the rest of my life." This group of students supports each other in making positive choices and in deciding to undertake other healthy and positive activities.

Arrive Alive

Arrive Alive is a student-led organization that promotes various activities as alternatives to drinking behavior. It was organized after two driving incidents in the 1996-97 school year that resulted in the death of one student and severe brain trauma for two other students. Students felt compelled to start Arrive Alive because they had experienced so many losses directly related to drunk driving. About a dozen students started the group, but it later swelled to over 50.

Arrive Alive was promoted through announcements in driver's education classes, posters, and announcements over the public address system. Activities for the 1997-98 school year included skiing, roller skating, and sponsoring a movie—"all activities that give kids an alternative to drinking" says a student leader. In a relatively short period of time, students and staff are declaring Arrive Alive a success. The hard data indicators include the number of students participating in the group, the number of students in the school participating in group-led activities and events, and the reduction of alcohol use by young people.

Peer Mentor Program

The Peer Mentor Program allows any sophomore, junior, or senior students wishing to participate to serve as mentors for entering ninth graders. The intent is to become a friend, someone who can help guide a new student through the rigors of the first year of high school. Students say that it's more than just helping them find their classes; it's also emotional support. Insecurity and uncertainty are common emotions first-year students experience in the first months of high school. Having an older student available makes the tran-

sition much easier, say two senior students. Students say that having someone they recognize in the hallway and can say hello to can be reassuring for first-year students. Three hours of training is provided for all mentors who are selected by eighth graders to be their partners. Last year, nearly 240 students volunteered to be mentors; 170 of 216 ninth graders had mentors.

Peer Tutor Program

As part of the Tiger Outreach Program, peer tutors began assisting their classmates in the 1997-98 school year. With a small amount of training, 20 youth were empowered to tutor other students in a variety of subject areas. Peers are motivated to achieve academically by other peers, and both students and staff deem the program successful.

Community Service Program

New Richmond students volunteer through the Community Service Program. Community service is actually an independent study option within the high school; while not mandatory, it is widely chosen. Beginning at fourth grade, students participate in activities where they learn about the benefits of offering their services to assist others. Students learn that they are an asset to and a resource for their community. Older youth also serve as teacher aides for elementary, middle, and high school teachers. Students also serve on CARE teams for other youth with challenges.

Adult Programs

New Richmond's adult programs offer opportunities for teachers to teach teachers, teachers to teach parents, and staff to receive support when needed. District Administrator Jim Wold says he firmly believes that staff and parents must have activities and programs that facilitate their own growth and meet their own needs. Schools not only serve students but the community as well. The Community Education program, directed by Robert Heebink, is regarded as a prototype in Wisconsin.

CESA 11 also provides staff development opportunities for New Richmond staff. An example of a significant program involved service learning training. The program involved both teachers and students and gave tips on how to start up and maintain a service learning program through the

schools.

Teacher Programs

New staff orientation: Orientation consists of a two-day workshop offered prior to the start of the new school year. This provides new staff with both the time and an opportunity to learn about the district's vision and mission, its general goals, and the focus of each individual department.

Teacher mentors: New teachers are paired with a returning teacher who has been trained as a mentor. These teachers meet at regular intervals to make sure that things are going well. A mentor is a contact person who can answer questions about everyday school procedures and processes that might otherwise create anxiety for new teachers. Through regular contacts the adjustment period for new teachers is smoother, helping them to become more confident and less stressed. It ultimately allows new staff members to become more available to students earlier in the school year, one of the highest stress periods for everyone.

Parent Programs

Kindergarten orientation: Parents of entering kindergartners and the students themselves spend time in the kindergarten classroom becoming familiar with the activities, curriculum, and surroundings. Parent participation in school activities is encouraged.

Freshman orientation: The district provides a two-hour workshop on resiliency and assets for parents of entering ninth graders. The Healthy Community/Healthy Youth Team (HC/HYT) made a presentation to 180 parents at the beginning of the 1997-98 school year. Staff engaged parents in roundtable discussions on resiliency and developmental assets. Parents learned about these concepts in an effort to create more consistency between school and home and to share the methods and strategies that help to make students successful.

Parenting classes: A local business provides a grant to the New Richmond schools that pays for district teachers to conduct parenting classes during the workday at the company site. The company also grants time to its employees to participate in parenting classes during their work day.

Family and Community

Connections

Over the last three years, school-community connections have significantly increased, according to the district administrator. The district also incorporates strategies that build and strengthen students' assets through the HC/HYT, which examines how best to implement many prevention and resiliency approaches in the most integrated and effective fashion.

Specific to New Richmond are the HC/HYT; Business, Industry, Community, and Education Partnership (BICEP) Team; and the Parent Communications Network (PCN). PCN is a parent organization that started about 10 years ago at the urging of students who sought to create alternative activities during graduation night.

Family Service of St. Croix County also offers services in the New Richmond area. This agency operates the Employee Assistance Program for the school district as well as the health and wellness program at the schools.

Healthy Community/Healthy Youth Team

HC/HYT was developed with funding from the DPI as a part of the Comprehensive School Health Program development. The team includes the high school, middle school, and elementary counselors; two high school teachers and one middle school teacher; the high school guidance secretary; and two members from the community. Community members include a parent also involved in the St. Croix County Extended Industries and a member of the clergy.

The HC/HYT Team has developed initiatives involving the community. For instance, a local law firm established the George Norman Memorial Lecture series which created an intergenerational opportunity to learn and discuss important topics of the day. Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College and the district administration have weekly coffee chats to maintain continuing communication on topics of mutual interest. A local business is supporting parenting classes given at the facility site.

HC/HYT members write a column, "Our Resilient Community," in the local newspaper. The article attempts to connect Search Institute's 40 assets to what kids in the community need to succeed. Topics have included "Bonding to School," "Nonviolent Conflict Resolution," "Community Service," and "Positive View of Personal Future."

HC/HYT is now recruiting journalism students to write a bimonthly column on topics reflecting their perspectives on resiliency and the 40 assets. District staff report they are also planning to highlight a local business or agency that is using “resiliency” to help youth.

Parents Communication Network

Now in its tenth year, PCN is a group of parents who work with students to sponsor an annual all-night graduation party for youth who want to have an alcohol-free environment in which to celebrate.

Community Assessment

St. Croix County conducted a public health assessment in 1995-96 as part of “Healthier People in Wisconsin: A Public Health Agenda for the Year 2000.” A New Richmond School District counselor served on the Adolescent Health Assessment Task Force, which was charged to assess adolescent health issues. The group recommended that the Search Institute be involved to get a broad mea-

sure of the assets of youth in the community rather than focusing only on the problems that youth possess.

The task force followed up on the assessment and worked on creating opportunities for youth support. Their main area of focus was to identify a caring adult for every youth in St. Croix County generally and in the New Richmond schools specifically.

Future Directions

District Administrator Jim Wold stresses that the bottom line is to improve teaching and learning. Ultimately the questions will be, Do students perform better? Do they perform better not only academically but also socially, morally, and culturally? Are these students doing better than they would have three, five, or even ten years ago if they had not participated in these activities? Is teaching improving and leading to improved learning? Is the school environment helping students extend themselves to others in service? Are parents participating in school programs designed to create a strong home/school connection?